

THE INFLUENCE OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP ON JOB PERFORMANCE IN THE SRI LANKA AIR FORCE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Authentic leadership is a form of leadership, based on sincerity, and self-awareness. The authentic leader is genuine in beliefs, values, and mores, demonstrating a sincere desire for subordinates to advance in their careers, and for the organization to succeed. We conjecture that such leaders inspire employees to give of their best, engaging them in tasks, while leading them to strive for superior performance. Using an under-researched sample of Sri Lanka Air Force personnel, we created structural equations models using the Smart PIs software. We found that authentic leadership significantly influenced job performance in two ways, 1) directly, in an authentic leadership → job performance relationship, and 2) indirectly in a mediation model, as authentic leadership → employee engagement → job performance.

Keywords: authentic leadership, self-awareness, Sri Lanka, Air Force, job performance, employee engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

To mobilize employees into a creative, and productive work force, leadership is needed to mold employee work attitudes and behavior (Tims et al., 2011). One form of leadership is authentic leadership. Authenticity is based on the injunction to know oneself, manifested in behavior in accordance with the true self (Harter, 2002). In contrast with other forms of leadership, such as ethical leadership, servant leadership, and transformative leadership, authentic leadership emphasizes, sincerity, and understanding of the self as a human being. Authentic leaders gravitate to followers who are credible, and aware of their thoughts, and behavior. Begley (2001) states that authentic leadership is a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices. Luthans and Avolio (2003) posited that authentic leaders possessed several characteristics. The first characteristic is self-regulation, as they base their conduct on a set of values. Walumbwa et al. (2008) is based on balanced processing of data, internalized morality, relational transparency in connecting with others, and self-awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, and how they influence their comprehension of the world.

Self-determination theory may be used to motivate this study. Employees are driven by different motivations on a self-determination continuum. They invest effort in their work as a form of intrinsic motivation, to achieve professional goals, and rewards through extrinsic motivation. Authentic leaders can provide the organizational support, by directing followers to connect with their inner selves to identify with their strengths, in order to pursue professional goals. They emphasize morality and sincerity in pursuing these goals (Ryan and Deci, 2017). Motivation and relatedness at work have been shown to increase with authentic leadership in multiple studies (Guerrero et. al., 2015; Leroy et al., 2015).

The existing literature is sparse in its measurement of the impact of authentic leadership on job performance. Shahid and Muchiri (2019) created a conceptual framework for the outcomes of authentic leadership, although they did not empirically test the relationships. Their review found that authentic leadership nurtures virtuousness, and psychological capital, thereby creating a work environment of positive emotional states, in which employees thrive, possibly leading to superior job performance. Jiang and Luo (2006) observed that the sincerity of authentic leaders increased worker trust leading to greater